# INDIAN SUMMER.

By Mr. JOSIAH MORROW, New Lebanon, Ohio.[1]

All Americans are familiar with the term "Indian summer," designating a spell of pleasant weather in the late autumn or early winter, characterized by warmth, calmness, and a hazy atmosphere. Our native writers have pointed out its delights. Thoreau pronounced it the finest season of the year, and Prof. George Bryce, a Canadian, writes of "that divine aftermath, the Indian summer, which attains its true glory only in the Northwest."

In my boyhood I often wondered how it got its name and what there was about it that was Indian-like. The expression is known to be of American origin and I think was most probably first used by the backwoodsmen who came in contact with the Indians. It is not an old literary term. Its earliest use thus far found was in 1790, and less than half a dozen instances of its use have been discovered in writings a century old. It became common in the early part of the nineteenth century in this country. From America it spread to England and is now heard among English people throughout the world.

It has long been used in a figurative sense and applied to the serene and happy days of old age. When Queen Victoria became 80, Alfred Austin, poet laureate of England, addressed her in a birthday poem entitled "An Indian Summer," in which are the lines:

> Long may the Indian Summer of your days
> Yet linger in the land you love so well.

Much was written on the origin of the name and many theories were advanced as to why it was first applied, but no attempt was made to give its history in detail until Albert Matthews of Boston became interested in the term and for a number of years collected material which he embodied in an elaborate paper on "The term Indian summer" printed in the Weather Review in 1902. This paper, with its many references and footnotes, contains matter enough to make a small volume. The author cites a large number of passages from American and British writers of prose and poetry in which the term is used. Most of the facts in the present article are derived from Mr. Matthews's paper.

The investigations of Mr. Matthews forced upon him the conclusion that the expression is not an old one and that none of the early writers on America ever employed it. After the examination of a large number of early writings in which were allusions more or less frequent to the climate and weather of North America, not one passage was found in which Indian summer occurs. The term is not found in the earlier editions of Webster's Dictionary in 1806 and 1828 and it first appears in a dictionary in the 1841 edition of Webster.

The earliest use of the term Mr. Matthews found was in the journal of Maj. Ebenezer Denny, who had been designated by the governor of Pennsylvania to protect the frontier of that State from Indian incursions. While at French Creek, near the present city of Erie, Pa., Maj. Denny made this entry in his journal on October 13, 1794: "Pleasant weather. The Indian summer here. Frosty nights."

Only two other instances of the use of the term before 1800 were found—one by a writer at New Haven, Conn., in 1798, and the other by Volney, the noted French traveler, who was in this country from 1795 to 1798 and whose book was published in 1803.

In the first 15 years of the last century only three instances of the use of the term were found, in 1809, in 1813, and in 1815. The last of these was by Dr. Daniel Drake, of Cincinnati.

As the century advanced the term became more common. De Quincy is cited as the first English writer to use it, which he did in 1830. From 1840 to 1850 ten passages are cited in which the term occurs, one of which is from Whittier.

## ITS EARLIEST USE.

One purpose of the present writing is to cite a use of the term "Indian summer" I recently found which is four years prior to the earliest passage cited by Mr. Matthews. It is found in Gen. Josiah Harmar's journal of his expedition against the Maumee Indian villages in 1790. This journal is printed in the last number of the Ohio Archeological and Historical Quarterly.

The outgoing march of Gen. Harmar from Fort Washington at Cincinnati to the Maumee towns in the vicinity of Fort Wayne, Ind., occupied about 18 days, from September 30 to October 17, 1790. The journal notes that the first sharp frost of the season was on the night of October 6. On the return March to Cincinnati frequent mention is made of "fine weather," and "Indian summer" is used three times, as follows:

> Thursday, October 21. Fine weather—Indian summer. Having completed the destruction of the Maumee towns, as they are called, we took up our line of march this morning from the ruins of Chillicothe for Fort Washington. Marched about 8 miles. * * *

[1] Reprint from the Western Star, Lebanon, Ohio, Mar. 30, 1911, and should be read in connection with the paper on the term "Indian summer," by Mr. Albert Matthews, Boston, Mass., in the Monthly Weather Reviews for January and February, 1902.

The following note from Mr. Matthews, in reference to the paper by Mr. Morrow, and also to his previous papers, is published as a further contribution to this interesting subject:

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

"Since I wrote my paper I have run across only one extract for Indian summer of an earlier date than that of Denny's in 1794, and this one is still earlier than Mr. Morrow's. In 1782 J. Hector St. John, otherwise known as Crèvecœur, published at London his Letters from an American Farmer. This was in one volume, and there is in it no allusion to the Indian summer. But in 1787 Crèvecœur published at Paris his Lettres d'un Cultivateur Américain * * * depuis l'Année 1770 jusqu'en 1786. * * * Traduites de l'Anglois (Letters of an American Farmer from 1770–1786. * * * Translated from the English), in three volumes. When I read the 1782 London edition, which was many years ago, I supposed that it was identical (except for the language used) with the Paris edition of 1787; but later I discovered that the Paris edition contained much more matter than the London edition. On pp. 289-314 of Vol. I will be found, under date of Germanflats, 17 janvier 1778, Description d'une Chute de Neige, dans le Pays des Mohawks, sous le Rapport qui Interesse le Cultivateur Américain (Description of a snowfall in the country of the Mohawks with respect to that which interests the American farmer); and on p. 294 these words: "Quelquefois après cette pluie il arrive un intervalle de calme et de chaleur appelé l'Eté Sauvage, ce qui l'indique c'est la tranquilité de l'atmosphère et une apparance générale de fumée" (Sometimes after this rain there comes a period of calm and heat called the Indian summer; that which characterizes it is the stillness of the atmosphere and a general appearance of smoke). I have never examined these "Lettres" critically, with a view of ascertaining whether they were actually written when they purport to have been written; but I know of no reason for questioning their dates. At all events, even if the above account was not actually written on Jan. 17, 1778, at least it was published in 1787, and so antedates by three years the new extracts from Harmar. It is certainly extraordinary that the term should first have appeared in a book published in Paris, and I leave it to you to make what you can out of it. The term is not found in Wright's English Dialect Dictionary. (Signed) Albert Matthews, Boston, Mass., Apr. 9, 1911.

Saturday, October 23. Indian summer. Took up our line of march this morning at 8 o'clock and encamped about 24 miles from the ruins of the Maumee towns. This day's march, about 16 miles, much encumbered with our wounded men. * * *

Sunday, October 31. Fine clear weather. Indian summer. Marched and halted a little while at what is called "Sugar Camp," from thence to Caesar's Creek, a branch of the Little Miami, 3 miles. Thence crossed the Little Miami.

These are the earliest instances found of the use of the term. All three were written in the Northwest Territory by a soldier who had been in command of two forts in that territory, one on the Muskingum and one at Cincinnati. Assuming that the general wrote his journal in camp after each day's march, he first wrote "Indian summer" in the vicinity of the present city of Fort Wayne, Ind., the second time near the western boundary of Ohio, and the third time near the Little Miami, about 5 miles northeast of Lebanon. At this time Gen. Harmar was commander in chief of the United States Army.

It is worthy of note that Ebenezer Denny, whose use of the term was the earliest found by Mr. Matthews, was a lieutenant in Harmar's expedition, and he wrote out a detailed account of the movements of the Army, making no note, however, of the weather.

While two officers in the Indian wars are the earliest writers to use the name Indian summer, we may well believe that the expression was a common colloquialism among the border men and backwoodsmen at an earlier date.

## REASON FOR THE NAME.

As to the reason for the name several theories have been advanced. One which I not infrequently heard in my boyhood was that this season was the time when the Indians burned the woods and dry grass. Dr. Daniel Drake, in his Picture of Cincinnati and the Miami country, published at Cincinnati in 1815, cautiously suggests rather than advocates this view. He says: "The cause of the smokiness is supposed to be the conflagration by the Indians of withered grass and herbs on the extensive prairies of the northwest, and hence perhaps the name of the season."

Rev. Joseph Doddridge, who lived on the border which suffered from Indian warfare, says the first settlers enjoyed no peace except in the winter when the savages were unable to make their incursions. The white people, who had been cooped up in the little fortified stations in summer and autumn, hailed with joy the onset of winter when they could return to their farms and cabins. If, however, after a short spell of cold weather, the warm and hazy time commenced, the settlers would be distressed because it afforded the Indians another opportunity to resume their ravages. It was another summer for the Indians. A backwoodsman, says Doddridge, seldom heard the expression without a feeling of horror.

Other theories take us back into Indian mythology and Indian legends. But these may be dismissed, for there is good reason to believe that the name originated with the whites. Nothing corresponding to it is said to be found in any Indian language.

It may be that its true origin can never be traced. The origin of many words and expressions can never be discovered. Possibly the men who first used the term "Indian summer" could give no good reason for their doing so. It is only known with certainty that the expression is of American origin, was introduced into England from America, and is now spread over the English-speaking worlds.